Disability Visibility Podcast

Episode 52: Podcasting

Guests: Bri M. and Thomas Reid

Host: Alice Wong

Transcript by Cheryl Green

For more information: https://disabilityvisibilityproject.com/podcast/

Introduction

[radio static, voices singing with hip-hop beat]

LATEEF MCLEOD: This is the *Disability Visibility Podcast* with your host, Alice Wong.

ALICE WONG: Greetings, people of earth! Welcome to the *Disability Visibility Podcast*, conversations on disability politics, culture, and media. I'm your host Alice Wong. We're gonna get a little meta today because this episode is all about podcasting with two disabled podcasters: Bri M. and Thomas Reid. Bri is the creator of the *Power Not Pity* podcast, and Thomas is the creator of *Reid My Mind*. Check out these two podcasts after listening to this episode, OK? OK! Both Bri and Thomas share why they love podcasting and how this medium allows them to tell stories and connect with people in a new way. Are. You. Ready? [electronic beeping] Away we go!

ELECTRONIC VOICE: 5, 4, 3, 2, 1.

Introduction to Bri's interview

ALICE: So, Bri, thank you so much for being on my podcast today. So, Bri, why don't you tell me a little bit about yourself?

BRI M.: So, my name's Bri. I am a Black Jamaican disabled queer non-binary person, and I love podcasting. I really feel like podcasting is what I'm supposed to be doing in life because it just feels really good to do the work and spread the work and find community.

ALICE: And how did you first get involved in podcasting?

BRI: I developed multiple sclerosis around ooh gosh, it's almost five years now. You know, when I was first diagnosed with it, I was pretty much in bed maybe 80% of the time, and I listened to a lot of podcasts because voices and storytelling really made me feel more connected and would help me get through the day. So, as I started to get my strength back, I started to be more mobile and active, I decided that I wanted to create something too. And I decided that I wanted to do a podcast about disabled people of color because I didn't see any disabled people of color around me. I never really paid attention to disability justice or access before I became disabled. So, after, I decided that I wanted to do something for the community. I wanted to put disabled people of color out there.

[mellow ambient music break]

Power Not Pity Podcast, media, and storytelling to dismantle ableism and be accountable

ALICE: Let's talk about your podcast called *Power Not Pity*. How did you come up with the name of that?

BRI: [laughs] You know honestly, it just came to me. I just felt as though I wanted to not only empower people, disabled people of color when they come to my show, I wanna show that disabled people are not just instances of pity or inspiration porn, right? We're people too. There's so much strength in us. There's so much strength in the ways that we are so adaptable to systemic ableism, right? And I just wanted to show that with the name.

ALICE: In the introduction to episode 5, you mention something about how you believe this podcast is part of the process of dismantling ableism. Tell me about why you think media and storytelling is a key ingredient in dismantling ableism?

BRI: Well, I have always loved stories since I was a young'un. I've read and written stories since I was very young. I think my show and other shows like yours and Andrew's—*Disability After Dark*—I think what we are doing is so, so important because we add more angles and views, and we add different perspectives to the conversation, any conversation. Because disability is part of an identity that is intersectional to everything. I truly believe that when we talk to each other, when we communicate with each other, that's when walls begin to break down.

ALICE: Mmhmm.

BRI: I've found that with every episode, people are more engaged, and able-bodied people find themselves questioning their understanding around ability and access. And I love that. When people tell me that my show has made them really think about disability and disability justice and race and gender and sex: all of these things are connected, and to hear that it's had a positive impression on people has been really, really nice and really heartening.

ALICE: Tell me about, I guess, how you decide what to do in a episode. Is it usually a topic or a person you wanna talk to?

BRI: I'm more connected through the person and what they have to say. Really, a topic comes out of the episode that I've curated. I've researched this person and thought about it and considered what people would latch onto most.

[mellow ambient and guitar music break]

ALICE: What have you kind of learned from the experience of talking to five different people and producing five episodes?

BRI: It is not easy [laughing] to create an episode! But I love it. In my interviews I've been able to connect with people on a whole other level, you know? When people tell me their story and what they've been through, it just, it makes me stronger too. It makes me feel more powerful too just knowing that I've created even more community around me by just engaging with people on a more intimate level. And I mean that's the power of storytelling, right? Like, there's a certain responsibility that you have, I think, to this promise that you have to each listener. I just think that that promise is something that is so important, and it's just it's something that I've found to really hold me responsible and accountable to the work that I've done so far.

ALICE: And tell me more about this promise. What are you accountable to?

BRI: I just want each person who comes on the show to feel like their story is going to be heard and told in a really genuine way. I want each person to know that I've promised them an opportunity to just share who they are and what their lives are like and how that all relates to disability justice. And I wanna promise to each person who interacts with my show that you know, this is a safe space to engage with the ideas and the principles of disability justice.

ALICE: Thank you for that.

[mellow ambient music break]

Future ambitions for the podcast

ALICE: So, clearly there's a lot of joy and hard work and challenges with podcasting. What is the future for your podcast? What are your ambitions for *Power Not Pity*?

BRI: Oh my gosh. So many ambitions, Alice. [laughs] I want this show to be stronger and more influential with each episode. I just want people to feel even more welcomed by the idea of talking about disability. You know, for a lot of people, it's a scary thing to talk about. Oftentimes, when people acquire a disability, it changes their lives in a major way, right? I can't speak to the experience of having grown up with a disability because I acquired mine later in life, but I hope to keep the show going.

I hope to eventually create a network for podcasters with disabilities just so that people can find us more immediately and connect with us in yet another safe space. And just to put us on and show the world that we exist and that we're here and that we're dynamic and that we are powerful. I don't wanna be cheesy or anything, but [laughs] I think there's so much power in all of us. There's more to us than just our perceived hardships or our perceived inspirations. I think I would love to have a podcasting conference for disabled people. If we have a conference for all of us who are making new media and trying to put our voices and our experiences out there on the map, then we should definitely have a venue for our voices, to amplify our voices.

ALICE: I love it. I love it.

[bouncy music break]

What is your power?

ALICE: So, you ask all of your interviewees what their power is.

BRI: Yeah!

ALICE: So, I'm gonna ask you now.

BRI: I knew it was coming, Alice! [laughs]

ALICE: So, aside from storytelling, but what is your power or powers?

BRI: Because it always changes for me, I think right now, my strength and my agency within my disability is just knowing myself and knowing that there's more out there to life than what we are told, you know? There's more out there to life than what we prescribe ourselves to and what people ascribe to us.

ALICE: Mmhmm.

BRI: Different avenues can be explored through the lens of disability justice, and because I've become more in tune with my own disability and my responses to society and societal issues have changed so much and become more aware of access intimacy and what all of that means. And because of this, I know that I can create a different world. I don't wanna be cheesy again, but you know, it's really true: you can create the world that you wanna see if you work really hard and surround yourself with the right people and really, truly believe that it's possible.

Wrap up to Bri's interview

ALICE: Thank you for that. I guess one last question is how can folks support your work? So, how can they find you, and how can they support your work?

BRI: You can find me at PowerNotPity.com. That's my main website, and it's got every episode. It's got episode descriptions, it's got information about me, it's got transcripts of course, it's got links to my other social media websites, and it's also got many buttons [chuckling] where you can click to support me on Patreon.com. So, that's Patreon.com/PowerNotPity, and that's all one word, "PowerNotPity."

Becoming a patron gives you exclusive content, and it gives you just the ability to interact with the show in a different way. And also, you know, it's all about supporting all of our disabled creators, especially disabled people of color who are creating really good work. So, yeah. Find me on Facebook. Find me on Twitter. I'm slowly working on my Instagram account. But they're all the same handle: PowerNotPity.

ALICE: Great.

[bouncy music finishes this section]

ALICE: Well, Bri, thank you so much for talking with me today.

BRI: Yeah. Thank you for having me. This was great.

Introduction to Thomas's interview

ALICE: So, Thomas, I'm so excited to have you on my podcast today. Welcome.

THOMAS REID: Thank you very much, Alice, and I'm excited to be here.

ALICE: Would you like to first introduce yourself?

THOMAS: My name is Thomas Reid, and I am the host and producer of *Reid My Mind Radio*. I started about four years ago. I interview, and I do profiles about people with disabilities, and mainly people who are blind and visually impaired and people impacted by vision loss. And I myself am a person with vision loss, and I actually think it's part of my whole adjustment process, doing the podcast.

[chill music break]

Getting started in audio and goals of the podcast

ALICE: I'm really curious about how you first came up with this idea for your podcast.

THOMAS: So, I've always been interested in audio. I got away from that when going into college, and I went more the route of technology, computers, and finance. When I lost my sight, I got involved with advocacy for folks with vision loss. And as part of that, I started to both get

back into audio for my own personal thing but also to use as a tool to spread some information for the advocacy organization that I'm affiliated with, which is the Pennsylvania Council of the Blind.

After doing that for several years, I came across an opportunity to attend the Third Coast Festival. It's a conference about making audio, and I actually won a scholarship to attend that, and they call that the New Voices. So, in 2014, I received that honor and was able to attend. And I think I was one of two people with disabilities out there.

And so, someone informed me that an organization called Gatewave Radio in New York City was looking for original content, and Gatewave is a radio reading service. It goes back to a time when there really wasn't any technology for people with print disabilities, right? They read the newspapers, and that was transmitted over the radio. And so, that's when I said oh, OK. Well, this is an opportunity to just kinda get my chops on doing different types of stories. My style is more on the radio style. I like to produce. I like to edit. I like to try and get into the sound design and music and things like that and tell a story in a cohesive way.

You know, I'm a Black man. I wanna tell other people of color, I wanna tell those stories too. Trying to find people to tell their stories as well as to hear other podcasters come out and tell their own stories it can be a challenge. And I think part of that is just trying to find other blind people online can be somewhat challenging, especially when it's not about technology.

ALICE: You know, listeners and subscribers, what do you want people to get out of your podcast?

THOMAS: I want people to question their own belief, right, about what they think blindness actually means. I don't care how woke you are, [chuckling] you probably have some stereotypes, or you did the work to get rid of them or question them, right? It doesn't really matter what it is, you can probably take away an idea, a thought, a new way of looking at something, and maybe apply it to your life. But the reality as I can see it is that once it's labeled "blind," once it's labeled, "disabled," a lotta people gon stay away from it, you know? I don't shy away from it. I tell you that this is coming from a Black blind man, but I would just wish that people would be more open to listening to things from different perspectives.

ALICE: That's great. Thank you.

[chill music break]

The creative process, essential gear, and accessibility

ALICE: I also wanna talk about, I guess, your creative process. Could you just kinda describe what's your process like?

THOMAS: I tend to use just a real basic text editor to track from the beginning. So, if I'm sending the person an email, I might draft it there in that text editor. And then when I'm interviewing them, I might have all my questions. And then even when I'm writing my script might be in that same note file. After the interview is done, my piece is to figure out the way that I want to tell their story. The way a person may tell their story may not be chronological, and maybe the story works better that way, so sometimes I don't tell it chronologically.

I like to include transcripts now. So, I have no budget. I'm not trying to pay for somebody to do the transcripts! So, I try to do it myself, and so I can kinda write my script around the text that I transcribed and put it together that way. And so, even during that process, I might think of oh,

this would be a great place for this sort of audio or this song. You know, I may mix a song. I may take a piece of one song and you know, do some little audio filtering tricks on it or something like that. Once I have the script written, I record, and then I go into the editing portion of all that where you putting it all together.

ALICE: Are there programs or apps or equipment that you use that you feel like is essential that you wanna mention?

THOMAS: Oh, absolutely. There is a great program. It's called Reaper, so it's a digital audio work station. It's a multi-track editor. There are scripts that work well with screen readers, and there's a lot of work that's been done by a whole community of people who are blind and visually impaired audio makers. The pieces of equipment for me is my iPhone because either I'm gonna use Skype or FaceTime audio usually to have a conversation with someone 'cause that usually captures pretty good audio.

ALICE: What led you to kind of figuring out I'm gonna commit to this transcribing? Because it is hard. It does take up a lot of time or money.

THOMAS: I actually did a story on Laney, Laney Feingold. She's a great advocate and a great help for accessibility, and during that, she was just really cool about it—she was like, "Hey, so, when this is done, just let me know because I wanna make sure that it's transcribed." And at that time, I wasn't transcribing. She was willing to have someone transcribe it. She was gonna pay for it. And I sat with that for a while, while I was producing that episode. It really hit me. She's walking that walk, you know? That's the right thing to do. That is absolutely the right thing to do because how can I be out here talking about, "Hey, this is inaccessible! And this should be accessible for the blind community," but meanwhile, I'm not making my own stuff accessible for another community? So, I said hey, let me start it.

[chill music break]

Lack of cultural competence in *Black Panther*'s Audio Description

ALICE: One of your recent episodes this past August, you're in conversation with another person who's also blind and talking about the lack of culturally competent Audio Description in things like *Black Panther*.

THOMAS: I have two episodes that kinda deal with that. The one that you're referring to was an interview with Denna, Denna Lambert, and she contacted me after the first episode. It was really nice to hear from her as a Black woman and someone who shared the exact experience about, specifically that was *Black Panther*. You know, for 2018, Black people were waiting for *Black Panther*, right? [laughs] So, there was all of this anticipation about this movie. And so, blind Black people are no different, you know? I was pretty shocked that the voice was a British white man. That whole movie, that whole entire thing was about an experience for Black people, and so it felt disruptive to have this white man, this British white man kind of narrate the story for me. And it wasn't just the fact that it was his voice, it was what they tended to include in the narration that I only knew about after talking about the movie with other people, things that I missed.

ALICE: There are so many blind people with expertise and knowledge because they're obviously the consumers. It's interesting that it's not oftentimes consulting with actual people who are using Audio Description.

THOMAS: Yeah. I'm actually talking offline with some people about Audio Description now. Some people who are in that field have reached out, and so that's been a really good thing.

When I started to put that episode—the first one—about *Black Panther* together, it was one of those things that where I think, looking back, I'm so happy that I took the time to really make that an episode to kind of formulated my thoughts and put that together. And it was well-received. Hopefully, we can really have this conversation, talking about the issues, talking about things more than technology. I think those conversations are had, right, but they're probably had in the meetings of the advocacy organizations. They don't have them online. They're behind closed doors, and I don't know if they go beyond that. I think there are a lot of people who had the experience that you just take what you get, and you be happy with that because you know, you're lucky to have that.

We know it's always been a very popular thing that oh, the idea of being colorblind. "Oh, I don't see race." The idea that you just don't talk about it, that has not been helpful at all to anyone, and it's never really been my style. So, I'm quite comfortable talking about it and talking about it in a way that is respectful.

[bouncy music break]

The future of the podcast and a dream guest

ALICE: What is your vision for the future of *Reid My Mind*? Who's your dream guest?

THOMAS: In 2019, you're definitely gonna see things beyond blindness, beyond vision loss. I have more topics that I wanna talk about more like I guess you could call it—I don't know—mini documentaries or maybe just more of a journalistic thing. I don't know. I have some ideas around things that have nothing to do with disability that I wanna throw in there also, you know.

And as far as a dream guest, [laughs] well, it's funny because I made some steps to try to make that happen before. And it has nothing to do with blindness, but it does fit. But I've been a Stevie Wonder fan since I was like six years old, and everyone in my life knows that. You see Stevie on a lot of stuff. They talk about his musical legacy and all of that. But this man's advocacy, like I would just, I would love to just kick it with Stevie about his advocacy work and what he's done over the years, you know? Just aw, man. That would be amazing.

Wrap up to Thomas's interview

ALICE: So, what are some ways people can support your work or follow your work?

THOMAS: You can subscribe to the podcast on any of the major players, so that's the iTunes, most podcatchers, Google Play, SoundCloud. I'm on SoundCloud, Stitcher and TuneIn. One way that could be very, very helpful is to just, if you like it, leave a review. I don't want you to leave a review or rate me if you don't like me. [laughs] But if you like what you hear, by all means, give us that review on iTunes. That would be cool. You can find me at ReidMyMind—that's R e i d like my last name—ReidMindMind.com, and you could follow me on Twitter where I post all of the episodes. I'm at @TSReid, @T S R e i d on Twitter.

ALICE: Well, Thomas, I am so glad to talk with you today. It's been a delight.

THOMAS: It's been my pleasure, Alice. I'm very happy to speak with you, and I thank you for inviting me. I made it, y'all! I'm on Disability Visibility! [laughs]

ALICE: Woohoo!

THOMAS: I made it!

Wrap-up

ALICE: This podcast is a production of the *Disability Visibility Project*, an online community dedicated to creating, sharing, and amplifying disability media and culture. All episodes, including text transcripts, are available at DisabilityVisibilityProject.com/Podcast.

You can also find out more about Bri's and Thomas's podcasts on our website.

The audio producer for this episode is Cheryl Green. Introduction by Lateef McLeod. Theme music by Wheelchair Sports Camp.

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Thanks for listening, and see you on the Internets! Byeee!!

♪ …it's hard out here for a gimp ♪